

## WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for brokering commercial transactions between an originator and a provider through a communications network, the method comprising the steps of:

receiving provider criteria from each of a plurality of providers, wherein at least one of said provider criteria is included in requests for proposals forwarded to said respective provider;

receiving a request for proposal from an originator, the request for proposal including originator criteria, wherein at least one of the originator criteria is included in proposals received by the originator;

comparing the originator criteria included in the request for proposal with the provider criteria of a group of the plurality of providers;

selecting one or more providers from the group of the plurality of providers, the selected one or more providers having at least one of their respective provider criteria matching at least one of the originator criteria;

providing the request for proposal to the selected one or more providers;

receiving a proposal in response to the request for proposal from at least one of the selected one or more providers; and

providing the proposal to the originator.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of providing the request for proposal to the selected one or more providers comprises providing the request for proposal to the selected one or more providers without disclosing the identity of the originator.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of providing the proposal to the originator comprises providing the proposal to the originator without disclosing the identity of the at least one of the selected one or more providers.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of receiving a proposal in response to the request for proposal from at least one of the selected one or more providers comprises the steps of:

receiving a plurality of proposals from at least one of the one or more selected providers;

ranking the plurality of proposals; and  
notifying the originator of the highest ranked one or more of proposals of the plurality of proposals.

5        5.        The method of claim 4, wherein the step of ranking the plurality of proposals comprises the steps of:  
             receiving ranking criteria from the originator;  
             comparing proposal criteria in each of the plurality of proposals with the ranking criteria;  
10            selecting one or more proposals having the most proposal criteria matching the ranking criteria, wherein said selected one or more proposals are the highest ranked one or more proposals; and  
             sending a summary report of the highest ranked one or more proposals to the originator.

15        6.        The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:  
             receiving a request for clarification of the request for proposal from one of the selected one or more providers;  
             forwarding the request for clarification to the originator;  
20            receiving a response to the request for clarification from the originator; and  
             distributing the request for clarification to the selected one or more providers.

25        7.        The method of claim 1, wherein the provider criteria comprises one or more of industry sector, financing type, asset type, project type, geographic location, amount of funding requested by the originator, credit information, scope of distribution of request for proposal to providers, and deadline for accepting a response to the request for proposal.

30        8.        The method of claim 1, wherein the step of selecting one or more providers from the plurality of providers comprises the steps of:  
             storing the provider criteria received from the plurality of providers in a data storage medium;

searching the data storage medium for providers having one or more specified criteria included in their provider criteria, wherein the originator criteria includes said one or more criteria; and

generating an initial distribution list including one or more providers having the one or more specified criteria.

9. The method of claim 8, further comprising the steps of:

determining whether a provider of the one or more providers on the initial distribution list has provider criteria which does not match originator criteria in the request for proposal;

determining whether the provider will accept requests for proposals having originator criteria that does not match the provider criteria; and

removing the provider from the initial distribution list when the provider will not accept requests for proposals having originator criteria that does not match the provider criteria and maintaining the provider on the initial distribution list when the provider will accept requests for proposals having originator criteria that does not match the provider criteria.

10. The method of claim 8, further comprising the steps of:

determining whether a provider of the one or more providers on the initial distribution list has provider criteria conflicting with the originator criteria; and

removing the provider from the initial distribution list when the provider has provider criteria conflicting with the originator criteria.

11. The method of claim 8, further comprising the steps of:

determining whether the originator has indicated that a provider of the one or more providers on the initial distribution list should not receive the request for proposal; and

removing the provider from the initial distribution list when the originator has indicated the provider should not receive the request for proposal.

12. The method of claim 8, further comprising the steps of:

determining whether a provider of the one or more providers on the initial distribution list has indicated not to receive requests for proposals from the originator; and

removing the provider from the initial distribution list when the provider has indicated not to receive requests for proposals from the originator.

13. The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

reviewing the provider criteria of an unselected provider to determine whether a modification to the provider criteria may be made so that the unselected provider may be added to the selected one or more providers; and

sending a notification suggesting the modification to the unselected provider.

14. The method of claim 13, further comprising the step of:

receiving a modification request from the unselected provider to modify the provider criteria in accordance with the modification suggested;

modifying the criteria of the unselected provider;

adding the unselected provider to the selected one or more providers; and

providing the request for proposal to the unselected provider.

15. The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

reviewing originator criteria in the request for proposal to determine whether a modification to the originator criteria may be made so that an unselected provider may be added to the selected one or more providers; and

sending a notification suggesting the modification to the originator.

16. The method of claim 15, further comprising the step of:

receiving a modification request from the originator to modify the originator criteria in the request for proposal in accordance with the modification suggested;

modifying the originator criteria in the request for proposal;

adding the unselected provider to the selected one or more providers; and

providing the request for proposal with the modification to the provider.

17. The method of claim 1, wherein the group of plurality of providers comprises a group of pre-selected providers provided by the originator.

18. A method for brokering commercial transactions between an originator and a provider through a communications network, the method comprising the steps of:

receiving provider criteria from each of a plurality of providers, wherein at least one of said provider criteria is included in requests for proposals forwarded to said respective provider;

storing said provider criteria in a database;

receiving a request for proposal from an originator, the request for proposal having one or more primary criteria;

filtering said database to identify a group of the plurality of providers having provider criteria matching the one or more primary criteria;

selecting one or more providers from the group of the plurality of providers, the selected one or more providers having provider criteria matching the one or more primary criteria;

providing the request for proposal to the selected one or more providers;

receiving a proposal in response to the request for proposal from at least one of the selected one or more providers; and

providing the proposal to the originator.

19. The method of claim 18, wherein the primary criteria comprises one or more of industry sector, financing type, asset type, project type, geographic location, amount of funding requested by the originator, credit information, scope of distribution of request for proposal to providers, and deadline for accepting a response to the request for proposal.

20. The method of claim 18, wherein the provider criteria comprises one or more of industry sector, financing type, asset type, project type, geographic location, amount of funding requested by the originator, credit information, scope of distribution of request for proposal to providers, and deadline for accepting a response to the request for proposal.

21. A method for facilitating the exchange of documents between users on a communications network, the method comprising the steps of:

receiving a request to create a document exchange directory for a transaction;

receiving information on a group of users involved in the transaction;

providing the group of users involved in the transaction with access to said document exchange directory;

receiving a request from one of the group of users to submit a document to the document exchange directory;

storing said document in the document exchange directory; and

providing each of the group of users with one or more access rights to the document.

22. The method of claim 21, wherein the group of users comprise one or more of an originator, a user affiliated with the originator, a provider, a user affiliated with the provider, and an administrator.

23. The method of claim 21, further comprising the step of notifying the group of users of the creation of the document exchange.

24. The method of claim 21, wherein the step of providing each of the group of users with one or more access rights to the document comprises providing each of the group of users with one or more of: no access to document access right, viewing the document access right, retrieving the document access right, and viewing the group of members having access to the document access right.

25. The method of claim 21, wherein the step of providing the group of users involved in the transaction with access to said document exchange directory comprises enabling the group of users involved in the transaction to perform one or more of communicating with each other; viewing information on each user of the group of users, submitting documents to the document exchange directory, and viewing retrieved documents.

26. The method of claim 21, wherein the step of receiving a request from one of the group of users to submit a document to the document exchange directory, comprises the step of receiving a request from one user of the group of users to have a document stored in the document exchange facility, said request providing one or more access rights to at least one user of the group of users.

27. The method of claim 26, further comprising the step of:  
notifying the selected one or more users of the document submitted.

28. An apparatus for brokering commercial transactions between an originator and a provider through a communications network, comprising:  
a storage device; and  
a processor coupled to the storage device, the storage device storing a program for controlling the processor, wherein the processor is configured to  
receive provider criteria from each of a plurality of providers, wherein at least one of said provider criteria is included in requests for proposals forwarded to said respective provider,  
receive a request for proposal from the originator, the request for proposal including originator criteria, wherein at least one of the originator criteria is included in proposals received by the originator, and  
compare the originator criteria included in the request for proposal with the provider criteria of a group of the plurality of providers,  
select one or more providers from the group of the plurality of providers, the selected one or more providers having at least one of their respective provider criteria matching at least one of the originator criteria,  
provide the request for proposal to the selected one or more providers,  
receive a proposal in response to the request for proposal from at least one of the selected one or more providers, and  
provide the proposal to the originator.

29. A document exchange for facilitating the exchange of documents between users on a communication network, comprising :

a storage device; and

a processor coupled to the storage device, the storage device storing a program for controlling the processor, wherein the processor is configured to

receive a request to create a document exchange directory for a transaction,

receive information on a group of users involved in the transaction,

provide the group of users involved in the transaction with access to said document exchange directory stored on the storage device,

receive a request from one of the group of users to submit a document to the document exchange directory,

store said document in the document exchange directory, and

provide each of the group of users with one or more access rights to the document.